

3 Garveyism, Akinpelu Obisesan and his Contemporaries: Ibadan, 1920-22

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During a brief period between December 1920 and April 1922, a group of educated young men in Ibadan, among them J. Akinpelu Obisesan,¹ developed an enthusiasm for the ideas of Marcus Garvey. Why was this group attracted to Garvey's message, what were they trying to achieve, and why was their interest in Garvey, and more broadly in nationalism, so ephemeral?

THE 1920 CRASH IN TRADE, AND NATIONALISM IN NIGERIA

The simple answer is that they were responding to the collapse in produce prices after the shortlived boom of 1919-20, and the consequent trade depression. The cocoa price in Ibadan shot up briefly to £80 per ton in 1920; by the end of the season it was £28 and in 1921 fell further to as low as £15.² A number of African traders, several of whom had been shipping produce directly to England, lost large sums of money. Lever Brothers bought the Royal Niger Company in 1920 and the larger European firms amalgamated into larger combines and consolidated their hold on the export trade in produce and in the import of staple consumer items, notably cotton. Garvey's message, concerning the need to found independent black banks, shipping lines and businesses, spoke directly to the plight of African traders, as did the nationalist plans put forward by the leaders of the National

Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) closer to home in Lagos and Accra.

However, in Nigeria, nationalists were mollified by Governor Clifford's policies. He rejected Sir William Lever's demands for land to establish palm-oil plantations and created a Legislative Council with African members from the southern provinces. Provincial representatives were nominated by the government, but Lagos and Calabar were allowed to elect three and one delegates respectively and to vote for their town councils. The leading nationalist, Herbert Macaulay, was able to dominate Lagos elections in the 1920s and 1930s. Trade began to recover in 1924 and it was not until 1929 that Macaulay and other nationalists began to plan ways to export produce abroad directly to circumvent the oligopoly of the European trading firms.³ In 1929, Levers bought out their main rivals, the African and Eastern Trading Company, to form the United African Company, which became part of the Unilever combine.⁴

J. Akinpelu Obisesan kept a daily diary, in English, from 1920 to 1960. His diaries⁵ enable us to tell a more complex story for Ibadan, through the eyes of someone whose imagination was briefly captivated by Garveyism, and who was involved in attempts to establish the NCBWA in Ibadan, to found a newspaper in the town, and in the Ilupeju Society, which sought to oppose the local policies of the colonial administration in Ibadan. The newspaper materialised in 1924; like the local interest in Garveyism, the Ibadan branch of the NCBWA and the Ilupeju Society failed to survive the year 1922.

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN IBADAN

At the start of the colonial period in 1893, Christians formed a distinctive community in Ibadan, situated around the Anglican church at Kudeti. The larger number of Muslims were dispersed among the compounds of the city and a Muslim, Are Latosisa, had been ruler of Ibadan between 1871 and 1885.⁶ However, they too were still a small minority and in the early years of the century, adherence to Islam brought people into

conflict with their families over ritual practices and the way town festivals were celebrated. Islam spread most rapidly in Ibadan during the reign of Are Latosisa's son, Bale Situ (1914-25), by when its claims were more easily reconciled with local customs by most of its new adherents. Gbadamosi⁷ says that Islam's popularity was spread by Muslim societies (*egbe*), notably the Egbe Kila, led in Ibadan by the wealthy trader, Adebisi Giwa.⁸

Obisesan's early career is remarkably similar to that of several of his contemporaries among the educated Christians of Ibadan, such as I. B. Akinyele⁹ and J. O. Aboderin.¹⁰ After completing their schooling, they were employed as clerks by the local administration, customs and railway departments. Aboderin in 1911, and Obisesan in 1913, left government service to seek better opportunities with the European trading firms and then tried to trade on their own account. Obisesan was never successful as a trader; he was too involved in family land matters. But Aboderin took advantage of the brief post-war boom to ship produce abroad. His brief moment of prosperity was shortlived. Prices fell and, like many of his contemporaries, he lost a lot of money.

Ibadan's leading Muslim traders survived the crash far better than their Christian contemporaries. The educated Christians had the advantage of speaking and writing in English and, one might have expected, of more easily forming relationships with the European managers of the trading companies to whom they looked for supplies of cotton, custom and credit for export crops. However, they engaged in trade, as in farming and other activities, in order to finance the lifestyle which they believed appropriate to a Christian gentleman. For the prominent Muslim traders, trading was a way of life. Thus, after the crash and for the next two decades, three¹¹ Muslim traders were clearly wealthier than any of the others. They were Salami Agbaje,¹² Adebisi Giwa and Folarin Solaja.¹³ It was to these men that Obisesan, and others, looked for help in trying to get back into trading in the 1920s. On 3 May 1923, A. B. Akinloye¹⁴ joined Agbaje, only to lose this position within a month. Obisesan reflected, with perhaps some exaggeration, that during the boom days, Akinloye had been Agbaje's equal.¹⁵ It was the Christian elite whose aspirations had been set back most dramatically by the slump of 1920.

CAPTAIN ROSS AND 'INDIRECT RULE' IN IBADAN

Ibadan's educated and commercial elites were not only worried about the poor conditions of the produce trade. Governor Clifford's policies in Lagos may have been conciliatory towards the concerns and interests of the elite. In Ibadan, however, the policies of the Resident, Captain Ross, humiliated the Ibadan chiefs, the educated elite and the town itself.

Captain Ross, a 'Lugardian', succeeded C. H. Elgee as Resident of Ibadan in 1913. Elgee had cultivated Ibadan's small Christian elite, and Rev. Okuseinde¹⁶ and Mr Adetoun had briefly sat on the Ibadan Council during 1903-7. Ross was determined to 'restore' the Alaafin of Oyo, 'Head of Yorubaland'¹⁷ to his 'traditional' suzerainty over Ibadan. As Acting Resident, he allowed the Alaafin to decide the succession to Bale Ibadan of Irefin, the Otun Bale, over the more popular Balogun Situ. But when Irefin led the Ibadan chiefs to petition the government against Ross in 1914, Ross engineered the rejection of Irefin by the Ibadan chiefs and his replacement by Situ. Irefin went into exile in 1914, where he died the following year.¹⁸ Ross moved the Residency from Ibadan to Oyo and established the judicial and political supremacy of Oyo over Ibadan. However, Bale Situ was unwilling to bow to the claims of the Alaafin and of Oyo over Ibadan and its chiefs. Ross engineered his deposition in 1925 for defying and insulting the Alaafin, in favour of Balogun Oyewole.¹⁹

I. B. Akinyele reflects the views of Ibadan's elite when he refers to Ross's Residency of Oyo Province (1913-31) as the 'Reign of terror',²⁰ when even the chiefs had to prostrate to white men or be slapped in the face.²¹ Ibadan

became a 'Tributary Town' [to Oyo] a hated and awful term; the *Ilaris* (Alafin's messengers) flocked the town and farms.²²

The great 'Oga' Master [Ross] hated the educated civilized men and usually termed them 'Lagido' a monkey; he caused the chiefs also to hate them; and he did practically nothing for the school²³ during his time.²⁴

Jenkins²⁵ writes that in Ibadan under Ross

Indirect rule, as far as the Chiefs were concerned, was largely a matter of very direct control mitigated only by intrigue.²⁶

It succeeded only in reducing them [the chiefs] to objects of abuse while eliminating entirely the clergymen and the small elite group ... from any significant political participation.²⁷

In 1914, the Egbe Agba O'Tan of Yorubaland was formed as a select and originally secret society of the educated and initially Christian elite of Ibadan, including both men of Ibadan families and men born elsewhere and led by such notables as E. H. Oke,²⁸ a former secretary to the Ibadan Council. The Egbe published the first (Yoruba) edition of I. B. Akinyele's history of Ibadan in 1916.

In 1921, a new society, the Ibadan Native Aboriginal Society (INAS) was formed. It planned to set up a printing press and publish a newspaper, the *Ibadan Weekly Review*, inspired by the example of Ernest Ikoli,²⁹ and with financial backing from Salami Agbaje. Among those involved in planning the new printing press and newspaper in 1921 were several members of the Christian elite, including I. B. Akinyele, Rev. A. B. Akinyele, and J. O. Aboderin as well as Ibadan's second richest trader, Adebisi Giwa. In 1922 the INAS was reformed as the Ilupeju Society, with Salami Agbaje as President.³⁰ Its primary concern was – like the initial impetus for the formation of the Egbe Agba O'Tan – with Captain Ross's policies and their consequences for the Bale of Ibadan and for the educated and commercial elites of the city.

The educated and commercial elites of Ibadan sought to advance their interests and secure recognition of their status within the colonial order. Their political concerns were distinctly parochial; their main objections to colonial administration were to the subjection to Ibadan to the arbitrary rule of the Alaafin of Oyo and his messengers and Ross's evident contempt for educated Africans.

OBISESAN 1920: FAMILY LAND MATTERS AND POLITICAL AWAKENING

Let us follow the story through Obisesan's Diaries. When the Diaries begin, on 1 March 1920, he has no money and is looking for workers to come and clear his cocoa. He sold just over 2 tons of cocoa on 12 March for £148.12.6 at £70 a ton.³¹ This

was to be the best price he would receive for his cocoa for many years.

Obisesan's main concern, at this time and throughout the next few years, is with the dispute between his family, the Aperins, and the family of Sanni Oke Offa over the 'overlordship' of cocoa farms in the Alagutan area. These claims were pursued from 1905 to the victory of the Aperin family over Sanni's descendants in the West African Court of Appeal in 1950, through intrigues with the Ibadan chiefs and influential townspeople and by petitions to the colonial officials. Obisesan has to compete with Sanni to secure the favour of the Bale and Chiefs, and spends a lot of time pestering their superiors, the District Officer and the Resident. On 31 January 1922, Bale Situ agreed, for a price, to switch his support from Sanni to the Aperin family, and on 27 February

For the second time, [the Aperins'] political dependents and tenants did farming work at Bale of Ibadan's farm estate today.³²

In 1921 and 1922, Obisesan also has to restrain the extortionate practices of members of his family. Although they were securing large sums of money from their tenants,³³ Akinpelu Obisesan sees little of this – payments recorded in his diary for 1921 amount to no more than £10 for himself.

Obisesan is keen to inform himself on wider affairs and reads four newspapers, as well as the weekly *West Africa*.³⁴ He also sends off a subscription to the Negro Literary Society in Lagos, and lectures his friends about events in Egypt, which he links with local political problems and disunity in Ibadan.³⁵ The crash in prices, and worsening prospects of trade, which he discussed with I. B. Akinyele on 15 June 1920, kindled interest in the visit to Ibadan of the Egyptian, Duse Mohammed Ali, who addressed a meeting at the house of Salami Agbaje on 30 July 1920 on the subjects of trade and banking, and the humiliation he had received in England.³⁶ E. H. Oke became a member of the African and Orient Committee and head of the Ibadan branch of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). Duse Mohammed Ali's message met a receptive audience from the leading Christians of Ibadan as well as the city's wealthiest Muslim trader.

Obisesan spends the rest of the year preoccupied with family land matters. On 16 December, he declares his attention 'to leave home [in Ibadan] and settle at Araromi to look after my personal farm', having realised (neither for the first nor the last time) 'his great folly', that the members of his family are cheating him, among others.³⁷ However, he does not act on this intention. He makes no other mention of engaging in farming activities and has no money with which to trade. He does comment on Ibadan's subordination to Oyo, and says that only the 'intelligent class' appreciate Bale Irefin's sacrifice of his title and his life for opposing this.

It is in this situation in which, on 23 December 1920, Obisesan first reads two copies of Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*. He confesses himself 'greatly infused with the spirit of Americanism' and identifies with the situation of 'the Negroes all over the world [who] are being downtrodden, ill-treated and boycotted', for which he finds evidence in 'the undignified discrimination of the Lugardian Regime'³⁸ found in Ibadan under Captain Ross. He fears that

were I to express my mind to the general public am afraid I would be charged for disloyalty, the aliens who rule us would indict me but the men of my kin would regard it a spirit of true patriotism³⁹

OBISESAN, 1921: POVERTY AND NATIONALISM

The New Year, 1921, finds Obisesan still in poverty and finding it difficult to borrow money and in March he records that his three wives 'are in secret love-conspiracy against him'.⁴⁰ Cocoa prices have fallen by three-quarters since the previous season and at the beginning of March he is only able to realise £32.6.6 from the sale of his cocoa. Over the year his expenditures, as listed monthly in his diary, amount to £79.7.0, about double his recorded income.⁴¹

He finds I. B. Akinyele unreceptive to his denunciations of European rule.⁴² Balogun Sowemimo, with whom he discusses the NCBWA⁴³ seems to be more in tune with his ideas and he receives news of the NCBWA with interest and approbation in June.⁴⁴ However, E. H. Oke, who had taken the lead in supporting the NCBWA in Ibadan, had assured Captain Ross that

in Ibadan they did not participate in the political aims of the National Congress.⁴⁵

Obisesan's newfound nationalism is not incompatible with Imperial patriotism. On 2 June 1921 I. B. Akinyele told him the latest news of industrial unrest in Britain and that the British government was preparing for a revolutionary movement aiming at a Republican form of government. Obisesan comments:⁴⁶

By this news I am sadly depressed for I would wish the king and the nobles of the Empire eternal enjoyment of their noble and royal births respectively. England is already a crowned Republic – however something has gone wrong with the present system of Govt.

On 8 June 1921 Obisesan was concerned at the extraordinary 'news' that 'the King was driven from the palace and a strong revolutionary movement was on the surface'.⁴⁷ As an educated Christian, Obisesan was himself a product of Empire, but his monarchism also reflected his respect for the rights of 'traditional' rulers, among whom he counted his own family and which he believed supported their thoroughly untraditional claims to allocate forest land for the cultivation of cocoa trees.

Obisesan's own circumstances did not match his own aspirations. On 10 June he notes his own jealousy at

news of gorgeous robes with which Adebisi dressed himself today in attending Mohammedan service I have worked like a man who is entitled to £3000 salary but I have got nothing time must surely change – the poor of today may become the rich of tomorrow – I do envy Adebisi – certainly he is destined only to rise –⁴⁸

Early the next year, Obisesan accompanied Agbaje and Adebisi on a visit to the Balogun and Otun Balogun of Ibadan and reflects,

Nobody in this town will revere anyone of no means, he would be counted as no-man – the great presents made to us forced me to recognise that Messrs. Agbaje and Adebisi are being held in a very high esteem – after all what is our intelligence, our school going and our reading of books without getting money to back this [sic] three things.⁴⁹

Trade offered few prospects in 1921. There was a 'money famine everywhere'.⁵⁰ Cocoa prices fluctuated in 1921 between £15 and £18 per ton. Palm kernels fell to as low as £6.10.0, recovering briefly to £13.10.0 and falling back by November to £7.15.0. Cotton prices dropped from 3.5*d* to 1.25*d*. a pound.⁵¹

It was now that Obisesan aspired to emulate Ernest Ikoli, and to be appointed editor of the *Ibadan Weekly Record* which was being planned by the Ibadan Native Agricultural Society. However, both Aboderin and Akinyele were sceptical of the plans for a weekly newspaper ever coming to fruition.⁵² On 20 September, Agbaje agreed to hand the press over to the managing committee. At this meeting Rev. A. B. Akinyele called Obisesan a 'wild politician'. Obisesan apologised to Rev. Akinyele and to Agbaje and was appointed editor of the projected newspaper on 4 October. In December he refused to work under the manager, J. A. Aribisala, who was appointed editor on 11 December but resigned from the whole business on the 26th, to Obisesan's evident satisfaction.⁵³

As his journalistic prospects waned, Obisesan turned again to trade. On 14 November Folarin Solaja of John Holt's, promised assistance; Obisesan's scale arrived at the market, but he had no money as yet to buy cocoa. He approached Mr Ricketts unsuccessfully for credit. On 11 December he arranged to buy produce in cooperation with Mr Adeyemo, using Adeyemo's money. He eventually delivered cocoa to John Holt's and on 15 December received payment from Solaja, less £2 for an old debt incurred during the previous year, which came as an unexpected insult to Obisesan. He also got money for produce from Mr Ricketts: the price was 11/6 per cwt [£11.10.0 per ton]. In January 1922 he sold cocoa to Rowntrees and delivered just under a ton of cocoa at £18 per ton to Adebisi Giwa's store. But neither the prices of cocoa nor the amounts he traded offered much scope for him to improve his income.⁵⁴

OBISESAN 1921/22: GARVEYISM AND IBADAN POLITICS

In the midst of his concerns over land and money matters, Obisesan talks to one Babarinwa on 15 August 1921 and

in our usual way we discussed over Marcus Garvey's plan and the Native Administration policy; the Government support of the Chiefs who are members of the Council in a way detrimental to the progress of the enlightened community like Ibadan.⁵⁵

On 19 August Obisesan writes:

Marcus Garvey is trying to build Negro Empire – the possibility or impossibility of which I am not much concerned to say but the downtrodden and oppressed Black knows that 'His Redeemer liveth'.⁵⁶

On 1 December 1921 Obisesan writes, improbably, that

whenever opportunity offers I will take shares in the Black Star Line, the Convention fund and the African Redemption fund.⁵⁷

On 6 December 1921 Babarinwa introduces Obisesan to Mr Ibaru, a Garveyite who makes a strong impression on him,⁵⁸ and over the next three months Obisesan reads issues of *Negro World* which he finds 'inspiring and instructive'. However, he is sceptical about the practicality of Garvey's ideas and their acceptability in colonial Africa. On 3 March 1922 Obisesan declares,

if Africa will redeemed, it will be the work of providence; Garvey, though a great champion of his race cause, does not know the aims and aspirations of Africans, politically, commercially, socially and otherwise; his plans are feasible[;] of course, a great number of Africans of intelligence believe that Europeans are demi-gods ... whom no one on earth can oppose. My conviction is that Africans will be free from European bondage, but when and what hour no mortal African can say.⁵⁹

In early 1922, the Ibadan Native Aboriginal Society emerges as the Ilupeju Society, with Salami Agbaje as President. On 22 January, led by Agbaje and Adebisi, a delegation visited Bale Situ, who told them of the indignities to which Ross had subjected him, and on 2 February they visited the Bale's main rival, Balogun Oyewole⁶⁰ and the Otun Balogun. Obisesan is still going back and forth between his family, the chiefs and the Residency trying to settle the Alagutan land dispute. He

sells the cocoa from his own farm,⁶¹ but still lacks an adequate source of income and is plagued by debtors: three seek repayment on 18 April.

It is between 12 and 19 April that the last references to Garvey are to be found in the Diaries. The UNIA had invited Sowemimo or his representative to attend the Negro International Convention in New York in August⁶² and an attempt was finally made, involving Sowemimo, Obasa, Obisesan, and I. B. Akinyele, to 'select names of worthy intelligent gentlemen to form a UNIA committee'.⁶³

For Sowemimo, as for Obisesan, adherence to Garvey, with his plans for a 'Negro Empire', does not contradict loyalty to the British Empire. Obisesan describes him as

a loyal friend of Brit. govt. A man of wisdom, tact and common sense. A patriot who believes in Garveyism's probabilities in Africa.⁶⁴

In his entry for 14 April, Obisesan refers to himself and I. B. Akinyele as Garveyites, but remarks

We must praise the British people in our heart and soul, they are the great civilizing agency who have rescued us from wars.⁶⁵

Garveyism now disappears from Obisesan's Diaries. His political energies are briefly committed to the Ilupeju Society, which visited Captain Ross on 24 June to assure him that there was nothing political in the society's plan which was, as Obisesan remarked, to call 'hoe - a spade'.⁶⁶ Ross was still suspicious and delegates of the society met with a group of 'elders', who seem to have been prominent Christians - Rev. Okuseinde, Rev. Akinyele, Balogun Sowemimo, J. B. Wilson and Chas Randall. Obisesan and the society's secretary, Adelagun, blurted out the Society's 'real purposes', to Agbaje's chagrin. Sowemimo remonstrated with the Society for seeking Government recognition.

OBISESAN 1922: NO MORE RADICAL POLITICS

Local radical politics appears to end there; there is no further mention of the Ilupeju Society in the Diaries. They do record

meetings at Agbaje's house on 20 and 26 April 1923 'to organise a body of young men to petition the Resident for constitutional reform of Ibadan council'. It may be that Obisesan and Adelagun's indiscretion had threatened the Ilupeju Society's ability to win the confidence of the authorities and that Agbaje had thus allowed the society to fade away.⁶⁷ The issues do not go away.

The Alaafin continued to plague Ibadan. On 15 July 1922 Bale Situ and the chiefs rejected the Alaafin's request that they tax every Ibadan male four shillings for his expenses in building his palace, the Afin.⁶⁸ On 4 December 1923, Obisesan refers to

the plan of the present day political officers to keep educated and enlightened youngsters in subjection[,] repress and set the chiefs against them.⁶⁹

The alliance of Ross, the Alaafin and the Balogun, Oyewole, against Bale Situ culminated in Situ's deposition three years later.⁷⁰ Opposition to it was led by the older Egbe Agba O'Tan of Yorubaland, to which Agbaje was to be admitted in 1925 and to which Obisesan himself belonged. It is the Egbe which sponsors *Yoruba News*, which began publication in January 1924 with D. T. Obasa as editor.⁷¹

OBISESAN 1922/23: BACK TO BUSINESS

Obisesan himself turned again to the business of finding a way to make a living. In April he had asked Agbaje to find him employment. Agbaje had strongly advised Obisesan to stay with farming, but said that when the road to Akanran was completed, he would open a cotton store for Obisesan there, and had subsequently given him £10.⁷² On July Obisesan writes to Agbaje,

telling him of the winning of cocoa-producers' hearts and that although in the past he has been fooled and duped by fraudulent people but he should give me chance.⁷³

Agbaje appointed Obisesan to buy produce on commission.⁷⁴ In August Obisesan bought palm kernels, at 7/6 per cwt

and initially passed cocoa on to Adebisi's buyer to seek Adebisi's favour, should Agbaje let him down.⁷⁵ In September 1922 Agbaje was offering him only 6/6 for palm kernels.⁷⁶ Obisesan continued to buy cocoa for sale to Agbaje, who would only accept properly fermented and dried cocoa, and Obisesan also sold to other buyers when he could.⁷⁷ In January 1923 he comes into dispute with Agbaje and implores Adebisi to buy cocoa from him, and in February buys cocoa with advances from two other buyers, S. I. Omikunle and Jas Martins.⁷⁸ In the 1922/3 produce-buying season, Obisesan devoted most of his energies to trading, so that on 30 October members of the Aperin family berated him for paying insufficient attention to family affairs and the Alagutan land case in particular.⁷⁹ However, his earnings were meagre. Competition among scale-buyers kept their margins low. At the end of February 1923 Obisesan was still in despair at his financial circumstances.⁸⁰

On 13 November 1922, Rowntrees sent a clerk to buy cocoa directly from the rural market at Moga 'thus stopping middlemen from their work'. Obisesan comments:

this firm is seriously contemplating to erect a prison house in which to confine forever the chances to rise of all Yorubas.⁸¹

In 1923, the Ibadan scale-buyers made a serious attempt to limit competition among themselves. They formed an Ibadan Native Produce Buyers Association [INPBA] and wanted the Native Authority to limit cocoa-buying to authorised markets, to prosecute anybody buying wet cocoa, to prevent Ijebus from buying cocoa in the Ibadan farming areas and to prevent scale-buyers from undercutting one another; their attempts to enforce their rules brought them into conflict with the Native Authority.⁸² Obisesan was appointed *pro tem* secretary of the INPBA, which suited him rather better than actually buying cocoa every day at rural markets.⁸³ In December 1923, Adebisi arranged for Obisesan to take charge of a Miller Bros textile store for £5 a month and 1/- per pound commission, subsequently cut to 6*d.* in the pound.⁸⁴ Obisesan was not to make a great success of textile-selling, and would lose his job after the next trade crash in 1930, but for the moment he had a regular income, albeit one which could not match his aspirations.

IBADAN 1920-23: THE LIMITS TO NATIONALISM

Cocoa prices improved in 1922 but fell again in 1923 and only recovered, though with sharp fluctuations, in 1924 (see Appendix 1 to this chapter). So the end of the interest in Garveyism and nationalism in Ibadan came in a year when there was a slight improvement in prices and trade, but well before the definite economic revival of 1924-29, following the 1920-23 depression.

Several problems stood in the way of the development of Garveyism and, more generally, of nationalist ideas and politics in Ibadan. Garveyism, and the NCBWA, had attracted support from members of a small, educated Christian elite. Their economic and political programme reflected their aspirations, which had been shattered by the trade crash of 1920 and the subsequent depression. E. H. Oke took the lead in forming a branch of the NCBWA and the leading Muslim trader in Ibadan, Salami Agbaje, had taken an interest in the proposals of Duse Mohammed Ali. Both the educated and commercial elites were offended by Captain Ross's particular version of 'Indirect Rule', which treated them with contempt, and subordinated Ibadan and its chiefs to the arbitrary authority of the Alaafin of Oyo. Agbaje offered his patronage to the younger members of the Christian elite by offering to launch a newspaper and as President of the Ilupeju Society.

Garveyism came to Ibadan in a journal, and not in person. Neither its form nor its message attracted any interest from the established Muslim traders who did not read books but kept accounts and were concerned with the practical affairs of business. Obisesan and his contemporaries lacked the economic resources and political standing to develop any political movement on their own. They needed the financial backing and political support of their more conservative elders, Muslim traders like Agbaje and Adebisi, and Christian clergymen and teachers like Rev. Okuseinde, Rev. Akinyele and E. H. Oke. Their elders recognised that local political decisions were ultimately in the hands of colonial officials, and sought to secure the support of officialdom rather than to challenge colonial authority. Hence their concern to assure Captain Ross that the activities of the NCBWA and of the Ilupeju Society were innocent of any political objectives. Oke

was nominated as Legislative Council member for Oyo Province in 1924, and succeeded by Agbaje in 1930. Adebisi Giwa bought the Alaafin's support for his elevation to the chieftaincy at the time of Situ's deposition in 1925.

Obisesan's generation would come into its own in the 1930s, but only when they secured the confidence and patronage of H. L. Ward-Price, Ross's successor as Resident of Oyo Province from 1931 to 1936. Ward-Price had been a district officer in Ife and Ibadan division between 1919 and 1931 and had the chance to observe, and dislike, Ross's 'new Oyo Empire'.⁸⁵ He appointed I. B. Akinyele and J. O. Aboderin as Councillors to the Ibadan Native Authority, initially on the nomination of the Ibadan Progressive Union, a political offshoot of the Egbe Agba O'Tan, and made Ibadan Native Authority independent of Oyo in 1933. Both acquired Ibadan titles, as did Agbaje. Obisesan became an Ibadan Councillor from 1939 to 1942, and member for Oyo Province of the Legislative Council from 1942 to 1951.

Garveyism, then, appealed to the imagination. But it did not offer any practical course of action to its prospective followers in Ibadan. Nor did the nationalism of the NCBWA. In Ibadan, nationalism could not offer a means of securing electoral office, or of earning a living either in politics or in business. The Christian elite of Ibadan, like the rest of Ibadan's citizens, was preoccupied with parochial issues, which had to be pursued through the politics of intrigue and influence, and which depended ultimately on the decisions of their colonial rulers. And, as quotations from both Obisesan and Balogun Sowemimo testify, the avid Garveyites were themselves loyal to the Empire and to its mission.

NOTES

1. J. Akinpelu Obisesan was the youngest son of Obisesan Aperin, the Agbakin of Ibadan, a noted elephant-hunter, whose family claimed the right to allocate land in this area when people began to plant cocoa there. After schooling in Ibadan and Oyo, Akinpelu Obisesan worked in the Resident's office and the railways, and from 1913 to 1914 as a clerk for trading companies. He then took on the responsibility of protecting the claims of his family to being 'overlords'

(*oloko*) of the cocoa-growing land around Akanran and Araromi against the claims of other *oloko* families and of the Ibadan chiefs, and the resistance of the family's farm 'tenants'. He became a clerk to Miller Bros from 1913 to 1930, President of the Ibadan Cocoa (later Produce) Cooperative Marketing Union in 1934, of the Association of Nigerian Cooperative Exporters (ANCE) in 1949, and of the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria (CUWN) in 1952. Obisesan was an Ibadan Councillor from 1939 to 1942, a member of the Nigerian Legislative Council from 1943 to 1951 and the Western House of Assembly from 1947 to 1951, and became noted for his conservative and pro-colonial views. He was appointed to an Ibadan title in 1960. In 1948 he received the OBE.

2. J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Southeastern Nigeria 1894-1934* (London: Longman, 1973), pp. 222, 225. See Appendix 1.
3. C. E. F. Beer and G. Williams, 'The politics of the Ibadan peasantry', in G. Williams (ed.), *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London: Rex Collings, 1976), p. 140; A. G. Hopkins, 'Economic aspects of political movements in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, 1918-39', *Journal of African History* 7, 1, 1966.
4. C. Wilson, *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1954). On the subsequent development of the oligopoly, see J. Mars, 'Extra-territorial enterprises' in *Mining, Commerce and Finance in Nigeria*, ed. M. Perham (London: Faber, 1948); P. T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) and G. Deutsch, 'Educating the middlemen: a political and economic history of statutory cocoa marketing in Nigeria, 1936-1947', Ph.D. thesis, University of London.
5. Chief Obisesan's Diaries for each year between 1920 and 1960, bar 1931, with some entries from 1914 and 1918, and associated Correspondence, were generously deposited by his family with the University of Ibadan Library. I am grateful to the Library for permission to consult them and to Mrs Babalola for her assistance.
6. I. B. Akinyele, *The Outlines of Ibadan History* (Lagos: Alebiosu Press, 1946), pp. 10-11 (tr. of *Iwe Itan Ibadan* (Ibadan: Egbe Agba O'Tan, 1916; and Exeter: James Townsend, 1946); S. O. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginnings of the British Protectorate* (London: Christian Missionary Society, 1921; 6th edition 1966); B. Awe, 'The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1964, pp. 244-92.
7. G. O. Gbadamosi, 'The growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908', Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1968, p. 92.
8. Adebisi Giwa. A Muslim trader and Miller Bros chief agent for their textile stores in the 1920s, second only to Salami Agbaje in wealth, a chief from 1925 till his death as Asipa Olubadan in 1938.
9. Isaac B. Akinyele, b. 1882, sometimes spelt Akinele in the Diaries, son of 'Daddy' Josiah Akinyele (1840-1924), one of Ibadan's earliest Christian converts and brother of Rev. (later) Bishop A. B. Akinyele, from its founding in 1913 to 1931. I. B. Akinyele attended the CMS Grammar School, Lagos and worked as a clerk for the Ibadan Native

- Authority, 1903–20, during which time he wrote *Iwe Itan Ibadan* (see n. 6 above). From 1921 to 1923 he was stationed at Osogbo as Chief Clerk, Census Department. In 1923 he left that job to farm. He was appointed 'Councillor' to the Ibadan NA in 1933, became a chief in 1935, and Olubadan from 1955 until his death in 1964. He was awarded the OBE in 1948.
10. J. O. Aboderin was a government clerk from 1903 to 1910; and a clerk and then an agent for trading companies until 1919. He then became an independent produce shipper, but lost a lot of money in the slump of 1921–23. He rejoined G. B. Ollivant and worked for them until 1929 when he retired to farm. He was a councillor (1933–36) and then became a chief. He died in 1945 as Abese Olubadan.
 11. A fourth Muslim trader of great wealth was Okunola Abasi Alesinloye who made his money in food trading, rather than from dealing in export crops, and in imports. He used his wealth to secure a title in 1918 and by 1920 he was devoting his time to chieftaincy, leaving his sons to manage his business. He was Bale (renamed Olubadan in 1936) from 1930 to 1946.
 12. Salami Agbaje, b. 1880. He worked for a saw-miller and first made money selling logs to the railways. He rapidly became the richest man in Ibadan, trading in cocoa, cloth and other items and establishing a motor transport business. He was appointed to the Legislative Council between 1930 and 1933, and became a chief in 1933. In 1948 he became Otun Balogun (Ibadan's fourth most senior title), which provoked a bitter agitation against him, to prevent his being promoted further. He was vindicated by the Butcher Commission (*Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the allegations of misconduct made against Chief Salami Agbaje, the Otun Balogun of Ibadan, and allegations of Inefficiency and Maladministration on the part of the Ibadan and District Native Authority, 1951*). He died in 1953.
 13. Folarin Solaja was the main African buyer and agent in Ibadan for John Holt from 1901 to 1927. He became a chief in 1930 and died in 1944 as Osi Balogun.
 14. A. B. Akinloye was subsequently jailed for embezzlement in 1930 following the failure of the Ibadan Cooperative Producers Association which sought to export cocoa directly to the USA (see refs to n. 3 above). Diaries, 5–20 November 1930.
 15. Diaries 3 May and 5 June 1923.
 16. Rev. J. A. Okuseinde, born 1860, son of James Okuseinde, a Sierra Leone Yoruba who had accompanied Rev. Hinderer, the first Christian Missionary Society missionary, to Ibadan in 1851. He was the first secretary to Ibadan Native Chiefs Council (1893–95), was ordained a priest in 1895, and sat on the Ibadan Council during 1903–7. He was a member of the Egbe Agba O'Tan from 1925 to 1940. G. Jenkins 'Politics in Ibadan', Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1965, pp. 440–1.
 17. The phrase was used in the 1888 and 1893 treaties between the British government and the Alafin of Oyo, though not the 1886 peace treaty among the Yoruba chiefs, to which both the Alaafin and senior Ibadan chiefs were signatories, nor the 1893 treaty with Ibadan, which gave

- Ibadan control of towns in the Osun and Oyo districts. Appendices 1-4 to Atanda, *New Oyo Empire*, pp. 296-308.
18. C. H. Elgee, *The Evolution of Ibadan* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1914); Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire*, pp. 95-7. On Irefin, see I. B. Akinyele, *The Outlines of Ibadan History* (Lagos: Alebiosu Press, 1946), pp. 22-3.
 19. Atanda, *New Oyo Empire*, Chs. 3 and 4; Jenkins, 'Politics in Ibadan', pp. 243-67.
 20. Akinyele, *Ibadan*, pp. 78-85.
 21. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.
 23. Ibadan Grammar School, founded 1913, Rev. A. B. Akinyele (see n. 9 above) was its Principal, 1913-31.
 24. Akinyele, *Ibadan*, p. 85.
 25. Jenkins, 'Politics in Ibadan', pp. 84-8.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
 28. E. H. Oke was born in Ijayi in 1847. He came to Ibadan as headmaster of the Bale's School in 1907. Oke became secretary of the Ibadan Council in 1912. He was a founder of the UNA church in Ibadan at Idikan. He was appointed to the Legislative Council from 1924 to 1930, the year he died. Jenkins, 'Politics in Ibadan', p. 440.
 29. Ernest Ikoli, Editor of the *Daily Times of Nigeria* until 1929.
 30. Diaries 7 October, 13 February, 17 June 1922.
 31. *Ibid.*, 12 March 1920.
 32. *Ibid.*, 27 February 1922; also 31 January 1922.
 33. *Ibid.*, 4 and 5 February 1921 confirm a payment of £186 to Abodunrin Obisesan, who is later required to repay £100, though it is not clear that he ever did so (Diaries, 10-12 February 1921). Also 21 February 1922.
 34. Diaries 8 April 1920.
 35. *Ibid.*, 18 and 19 March 1920.
 36. *Ibid.*, 30 July 1920. On Duse Mohammed Ali, see I. Duffield, 'The business activities of Duse Mohammed Ali', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, 1969.
 37. Diaries, 16 December, also 18 December 1920.
 38. Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard, Governor-General of Nigeria. Obisesan drafted an article, 'Reviewing the administration of Sir Frederick Lugard' (Diaries 23 April 1920) on Lord Lugard's administration, which he sent to *Lagos Weekly Record* on 27 May. On 24 February 1921, Obisesan mentions that (this?) article was published in the *Times of Nigeria* earlier in 1921.
 39. Diaries 23 December 1920.
 40. *Ibid.*, 9 March 1921.
 41. *Ibid.*, 3 March 1921 and 1921 passim.
 42. *Ibid.*, 13 February, 1921; 18 April, 1921.
 43. *Ibid.*, 10 March 1921. Sowemimo was, apparently, from Abeokuta, and recognised, by courtesy, as 'Balogun' of the Christians; this was not an Ibadan title.
 44. *Ibid.*, 10 and 23 June, 1921.

45. Ibid., 25 June 1921.
46. Ibid., 2 June 1921.
47. Ibid., 8 June 1921.
48. Ibid., 10 June 1921. Also 9 July 1921 where Obisesan similarly compares himself to Salami Agbaje.
49. Ibid., 3 February 1922.
50. Ibid., 30 June 1921.
51. NAI: CSO 26/06027: *Annual Report 1920*, Oyo Province, pp. 148-52. See Appendix 1.
52. Diaries, 14 July 1921.
53. Ibid., 20 September; 4, 5, 7, 15 October; 11, 26 December.
54. Ibid., 14 and 19 November; 5-23 December 1921; 20-4 January 1922.
55. Ibid., 15 August, 1921.
56. Ibid., 19 August; 1 September; 2 November 1921.
57. Ibid., 1 December 1921. On 5 September 1921, Duse Mohammed Ali had approached him to buy shares in his Intercolonial Company.
58. Ibid., 6 December 1921.
59. Ibid., 3 March 1922.
60. The Balogun is the second most senior title in Ibadan and he was then the presumptive successor to the Bale. Balogun Oyewole had been exiled to Oyo briefly in 1919 for plotting against Bale Situ. He succeeded Situ when he was deposed and was Bale from 1925 to 1929.
61. Diaries 27 and 28 February; 2 March 1922. Neither the value of the sale nor the price is recorded.
62. Ibid., 12 April 1922.
63. Ibid., 13 April 1922.
64. Ibid., 13 April 1922.
65. Ibid., 14 April 1922.
66. Ibid., 24 June 1922.
67. K. W. J. Post and G. Jenkins, in *The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), say that Agbaje had dissolved the society, and that it was later alleged (but without evidence) that he had done so at the bidding of Captain Ross.
68. Diaries, 15 July 1922.
69. Ibid., 4 December, 1923.
70. G. Jenkins, 'Politics in Ibadan', pp. 243-67.
71. The aims of *Yoruba News* were to promote the views of the educated Yoruba elite to the government - and their appointment to Native Authority councils. 'The educated people are the connecting link between the Government and our rulers', wrote the author of a series on 'True Patriotism' on 22 April 1924. It retained the concerns of 1921 about the fate of African traders. The first issue of *Yoruba News* on 15 January 1924 referred to the collapse of African capitalists after the trade boom of that year.
72. Diaries, 19 and 25 April 1922.
73. Ibid., 20 July 1922.
74. Ibid., 21 July and 15 August 1922.
75. Ibid., 21-4 August 1922.
76. Ibid., 22 September 1922.

77. Ibid., 21 September; 4, 5, 16, 20, 31 October; 1 November; 12, 20 December 1922.
78. Ibid., 15-18, 20 and 26 January; 7-9, 12 and 14 February 1923.
79. Ibid., 30 October 1922.
80. Ibid., 26 February 1923.
81. Ibid., 13 November 1922.
82. Ibid., 19 August; 12 September; 25 October 1922; 20 and 28 August; 4, 11, 15, 19, 25, 29 September; 1, 27, 29, 31 October; 1 November 1923.
83. Ibid., 8 October 1923 and 8 February 1924.
84. Ibid., 8 and 10 December; 1923; 29 February 1924.
85. Atanda, *New Oyo Empire*, pp. 251-82.

APPENDIX 1

Prices per ton for cocoa and palm kernels at Ibadan

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cocoa</i>	<i>Palm kernels</i>
1920	£82-28	£18 av.
1921	£15-18	£6.10-£13.10
1922	£20 av.	£8 av.
1923	£12-17	£8.5 av.
1924	£45 av.	£10.15-£15
1925	£27-£36.10	£15-£17
1926 Sep.	£25 ¹	
1927 Jan.	£58 ¹	
1927 Aug.	£42-£45 ¹	
1927 Nov.	£51 ¹	
1927 Dec.	£43 ¹	
1928 Aug.	£34-38 ¹	
1928 Nov.	£24.10 min. ¹	
1928		£15-£15.10 ^L
1929	£31.5-£36.5	£11-13
1930 Feb.	£27.10	
1930	£27.7.6 av. ^L (AR 1931)	
1931	£17.11 av. ^L (AR 1931)	£6.6.5
1930/1	£14-18 (AR 1930)	
.....		
1936	£22-45	
1937	£50-13	

^L F.O.B. Lagos, ¹ Ife.

Sources: Annual Reports, Oyo Province 1920: 143, 147; 1921: 148; 1922: 114; 1923: 121; 1924: 121; 1925: 92; 1927: 64; 1928: 98; 1929: 208; 1930: 196; 1931: 266-8; 1936: 74; 1939: 17. J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria 1894-1934* (London: Longman, 1973), pp. 222, 225; NAI, Oyoprof. CSO 26/06027, 26, 1/09723, 26, 2/12723 Vols 1-5, 6-9, 14.

See two different series for FOB Lagos prices in S. S. Berry *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change in Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Table 3, and G. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria* (Homewood: Richard K. Irwin, 1964), App. Table II-B-1 to 4, reproduced in G. Williams, 'Inequalities in rural Nigeria', *Development Studies Paper 16*, Norwich: University of East Anglia, App. Table 1.